1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

424 is a possible exception since he alone can exercise his magic; but here
756 too the feeling is not so much of ownership as of having obtained his magical equipment by inherent ability combined with a mystic experience. In the west the magician's power can be passed from father to son, or to some extent from mother's brother to sister's son, and a man can acquire his magical rituals from others; but essentially the concept of magical power is much like our modern concept of talent and ability.

435 The governing principle in the evaluation of objects which will be kept permanently by their owner is the ease with which they can be transported by human carriage or dugout canoe. The amount of labor consumed in their manufacture contributes in some degree to their high value as individual property, and the relative scarcity of an object in nature or in trade also makes its contributions to Murngin economic values; but the final desideratum is the relative ease of transportation [492] of the article, since this society has no domesticated beast of burden. Metal containers obtained in trade with white missionaries are extremely scarce and highly prized; yet if of very large size they will be given to someone remaining in camp or cut up and put to other uses.

181 The ultimate value is freedom of movement. Basically the largest
484 factor contributing to this value is the shifting food supply which necessitates change of location; but the feeling for change of location permeates the whole society and has become the most positive motivating factor in the thinking of any Australian aborigine, including the Murngin. All the white ranchers and frontier settlers know and have to make allowance for the partially acculturated blacks' uncontrollable desire "to take a walk about," chiefly under the compulsion of movement from place to place but also because of love for homeland and native culture. The desire to go to other places is forever present in the mental constitution of a black's behavior. If he is in his own clan land where he was born and where he grew to maturity—the center of his cultural heritage—he still feels the urge to go to the next horde or food ground. A flexible material culture and a like technological equipment must, and do, form his adaptation to the natural environment.

(For further consideration of this economic problem, particularly from the point of view of the selection or rejection of exotic articles from other cultures, the reader should see Appendix I, Social Change in North Australia.)

181 It might be argued that the factor of transportation did not prevent
796 a luxuriant growth of ceremonial paraphernalia, such as totemic emblems, grave posts, ceremonial objects of dress, etc. Although the native

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
O117 Murngin O117

is no pooling of resources; each collects food independently, working for her own family or family group. And again, as they travel, the women gather any materials they chance to find which may be of use later, in technology. In this way the people accumulate a reserve of string, fibre, (in various stages of manufacture), resin, bone for making of yam knives and awls, for domestic use, or for canoe and bark trough manufacture, and all the materials regularly used in technology. These are carried in the *bälti*, generally in the form of neat parcels wrapped in *bärrukälla* (*Melaleuca* bark). When the men make a chance visit to an area famed for its spear woods, pigments, or other special material, they gather this and carry it in reserve, for later gift or exchange purposes. Similarly, feathers or down (*rämmän*) of birds are collected, and *bulnyin*, the fur of the Brush-tailed Possum, which is valued also for ceremonial purposes, is stripped before the animal is cooked. The spines (*dimir*) of stingrays are also extracted and all materials useful for technological and ceremonial purposes are removed while an animal is being prepared, wrapped in neat parcels in paperbark and placed in the dilly bag until required for use. As this material is generally carried by the natives in their baskets when they are hunting, they are able to make use of any moments of leisure during a halt, or while food is being cooked, to repair and maintain implements and utensils.

Certain materials, particularly the fat of *kärritjämbäl* the Red Kangaroo, and of a few other animals, and the fat and feathers of some birds, chief of which are the Emu, Plain Turkey or Bustard, the Jabiru and Native Companion, which are difficult to approach, have a high "social value" and are greatly prized. These materials have a ritual sig-

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
Oll7 Murngin Oll7

uninitiated because they are endowed with a force called *marr* (*mana*)[18], and large presentations of food and *gerri* are obligatory to all those to whom these *räŋga* have been revealed and who thus share in the solidarity of the group. 431 561 614 778 796

Such obligations recur at every stage in each initiation, and following upon each ceremony a man must make a big ceremonial presentation of objects of value, *gerri*, such as fine spears, belts of human hair and especially gifts of the type that are appropriate to the geographical quarter (*kumur*, page 67), within the ceremonial exchange cycle in which his clan territory lies.

If a man comes from a group some distance away, and the occasion is an important one, a dugout canoe (*lippa lippa*) may be presented. This is a big gift and highly valued. It is important to realise that there is no attempt to assess the value of these things but rather to create a feeling of goodwill, to leave behind a good impression, which a man knows will enhance his prestige and react in his favour in future transactions. He knows also that he builds up goodwill by a reputation for generosity and that this in turn may mean that he will be selected as the recipient of the *wärna*, the armlets of opossum fur string or *lindiritj* (Lorikeet's feathers) and other paraphernalia 431 554 [435] [796] [777]

[18] *Marr* is a kind of spiritual force or "power" very like the Polynesian concept of *mana*, which underlies social and ceremonial life. It occurs in all sacred objects and is the "force" or "power" which makes them dangerous to the uninitiated or profane and a source of strength and "power" to the fully initiated members of the clan or other organisation. *Marr* is not strength or power, danger or sacredness, alone, although it may be each and any of these things. It is the power which makes a *räŋga*, a totemic object, sacred, which makes a dead body dangerous, and which brings good or bad "luck" in hunting. *Marr* is the force which makes a man *tjämbait*, i.e. successful or "lucky" in the pursuit of game.

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943) 1949
OI17 Murngin OI17

3.

CONCEPTION OF WEALTH, THE GIVING OF PRESENTS AND THE IDEA OF "PAYMENT"

435 The ideas of *wealth* and *value* in a strictly material eco-
436 nomic sense are difficult to define in Arnhem Land. There is nothing approaching "money" or its equivalent, no currency that can be used as a measure or standard of value or medium of exchange, no means of accumulating wealth in condensed form. The term *gerri* is applied to all objects of value, to material possessions.

435 The first thing that must be understood clearly is that
778 for the Arnhemlander all material objects are divided sharply into two categories, those which are *märdai'inboi* or *yarkomirri* (sacred), and those which are *wäkkinŋu*[22] (profane). Objects of the first class, called *märdai'inboi*, comprise all things entitled to be termed *yarkomirri*, which means that they are sacred by reason of dedication

[22] *Märdai'in* is the ordinary or "outside" name for the clan totem, of which the sacred or *därrpäl* (hidden, secret) name is *räŋga*. *Märdai'inboi* (of, or from, *märdai'in*) signifies that the object to which it is applied is sacred or tabu, that it possesses the quality of "power" or sacredness by virtue of its association with the *märdai'in* and hence it is *yarkomirri* and itself bears a name, i.e. the name of the clan totem to which it is dedicated. This at once restricts its use to members of a special cult, in this case to the fully-initiated members of the clan.

to, or association with, a totemic ancestor or a clan totem. 435 ●
In the second category fall all things ordinary, non-sacred, 778
called *wäkkinyu*, which in its literal translation means rubbishy, uncouth, outlandish, but is used also to denote merely the category of the non-sacred or "profane" in contrast with *yarkomirri*.

The first category, which comprises objects called *märdai'*- 778
inboi or *yarkomirri*, includes such things as the fine cere- [431]
monial armlets made from material which has been removed from the actual totem after the *ŋarra* ceremony, and sent as gifts to friends in other clans. In addition, it includes all weapons and implements, such as canoe-paddles, certain spears, baskets of special type, and smoking pipes which carry the *mintji*, the special totemic patterns of the clan, to one of the totems of which they have been dedicated. This 778
dedication may take the form merely of the giving of the [552]
sacred name, after which the object becomes *yarkomirri*, 784
or it may constitute a more elaborate ceremony in which 431
the *dälkärramirri*—the "caller of big names"—in his capacity of high priest, calls ceremonially over the object, the sacred *därrpäl* (hidden) names of the appropriate totem, thereby consecrating it. Thenceforth it becomes sacred. It is "*yarkomirri*". If it is a spear, game killed with it becomes *duyu* (tabu), if a canoe paddle, all food taken from the canoe propelled by the paddle is also tabu. Its chief attribute is that it possesses *marr*, spiritual power derived from the totem or totemic ancestor whose name it bears. Its use is prohibited to all but fully initiated men of the particular clan (or associated group of clans) from which it came, and in the case of the special, sacred *mintji* or painted designs, may not even be looked upon by profane eyes. To 431
possess these objects carries prestige, and their *marr* imparts [554]
power and strength as well as *tjämbait*—hunting prowess, 777
778

431 "good luck" in hunting. They make the hunter *mel kärku-*
[777] *luk*, far seeing, (lit. eye-clear). Such objects are given regu-
778 larly to friends and to members of other clans, particularly
[604] to people who stand in the relationship of *wäkku* (son, woman speaking: sister's son, man speaking) but although they carry the obligation to make heavy ceremonial presentations in return, any idea of straight-out exchange—in the sense of economic equivalence, of barter or trade, in connection with things that are *yarkomirri*, is unthinkable.

784 Under certain circumstances, and after a lapse of time, a
778 rite may be performed to remove the tabu from these objects, particularly from canoe paddles, to enable the women and children to be fed on the fish or turtle secured from the canoe, after which they become *wäkkinŋu*, "ordinary" or non-sacred, and lose their *marr*, their "power" (to the initiated) and their "danger" (to the profane).

422 Objects of the *wäkkinŋu* type come under no such restric-
● 435 tions. In the category of the non-sacred are all a
[771] man's ordinary possessions, his spears and other weapons, canoe, fishing lines, nets, harpoons and all his personal equipment, and for a woman, her yam stick, domestic implements and utensils, her baskets—and in fact all her posses-
[562] sions. For no woman may possess or use any object which is *yarkomirri*.

000 In the foregoing account some of the incentives which lie behind the gathering of food and the manufacture of weapons and material objects have been described. A number of questions now arise. Does a man make all his own weapons and the implements which he requires for his own use, or does he acquire weapons from other people and in turn make them for others? If so, how are these exchanges made and on what terms; how are values assessed, payments made? Is the matter one of straight-out barter, the balancing

But in few cases where exchange of goods takes place is the matter as simple as this. In almost all, the ceremonial accompaniment is the important factor, and the exchange or trade, the hard, matter-of-fact, economic aspect of the transaction, is to the Arnhemlander, relatively unimportant. Reduced to the level of mere "commerce"—the exchange of commodities, their value balanced against one another, shorn of the vital ceremonial, the transaction loses much of its meaning and interest to the native. To him it is the preparation for a visit to relatives within the ceremonial exchange cycle to discharge his obligations, the journey, the ritual, the formalities to be observed on arriving at the camp, the niceties of behaviour and etiquette, rather than the actual *gerri*, the goods themselves, that he values. So that in any appreciation of the economic life and exchange system of these people, in any study of their production of wealth and distribution or circulation of objects of material value, due regard must be placed on the psychological and social attitudes, which dominate and often mask and obscure, the undercurrent of economic exchange. Yet inside the framework of the kinship system and the clan organisation, within the exacting totemic scheme, each man carries on a system of exchange of *gerri*, of gift and counter gift, so that he is obliged to spend much of his working life in preparations to discharge obligations imposed upon him by the system into which he is born.

But in spite of this stress on the *traditional*, on the ritual and ceremonial aspects, the emphasis on etiquette and behaviour, there is no suggestion here of the "primitive communism" which looms large in the references which occur in text books to the economic life of the people at the level of culture of the aborigines. The very words

Not every man is skilled in weaving *bäti* (baskets), of which many types are recognised, each with its own name and each made for a specific purpose. A man with special skill in weaving becomes known, but he is called merely *koŋ mainmäk*, a "good hand". Such a man may acquire some local renown and receive substantial payments (*baka bäkmärämma*) in return for his work, but again, this is a tribute to, and an acknowledgement of, the *marr* of the master craftsman, the prestige he brings, rather than "payment" for his activities, his craftsmanship. But it shows the beginnings of the recognition of craft specialisation, the *virtu* of special skill in craftsmanship.

But in the case of the *lippa lippa*, the wooden dugout canoes, which may exceed 24 feet in length and may be capable of carrying upwards of six to eight men on sailing

to use these stingray spines is the prerogative of these clans only and is jealously guarded.

Again, the fine appearance and balance of a spear is not always a gauge of its worth. I once remarked to an informant, Raiwälla, of a spear shaft, that it was crooked and twisted, and the spear not of much value. But he corrected me quickly and pointed out that as the shaft was crooked the spear was not "flash" and was therefore more likely to fly straight to its mark. Such a remark is enlightening, because it stresses at once the great difference in the way in which the white man and the Arnhemlander look at even so simple an artefact as a spear. To the white man, a wooden shaft is of good or indifferent craftsmanship, but the native attributes personality to it. Its very appearance may be deceptive. It may possess *marr* from its background and association. For this reason a native may place great value upon spears received within the ceremonial exchange cycle, from areas renowned for weapons of a certain type, although to the eye of the white man they may appear to be inferior to those which he makes for himself. The native recognises the prestige (the *marr*) of the master craftsman. By their associations certain *gerri* possess *marr*, and they have therefore a vastly enhanced *psychological* value as fighting or hunting weapons.

[396] voyages in the open sea, the matter is different. These craft
501 are hollowed out of a single tree. They have no keels, but are quite smooth underneath, and today are built without outriggers (although these are said to have been used by the Macassars), and depend for their safety and stability as much on the skill employed in their manufacture as in
●[435] the seamanship of their crews. These *lippa lippa* are unlike any other element of material culture and are valued greatly.
173 The natives say that in former times the Macassar voyagers
439 brought these craft to Arnhem Land each season in their
648 praus and that a prau carried as many as eight or ten *lippa*
501 *lippa*. When the time came for their departure, the Macassar men presented the canoes to the natives as part of their farewell payment, and this became a ceremonial occasion.

177 Before the coming of the Indonesian voyagers the natives
501 used only bark canoes,[20] called *bärwän*, and swimming logs,
[396] and it was only after the introduction by the Macassars of the *lippa lippa*, together with iron tools for cutting it, that the Arnhem Land people began making wooden canoes for themselves. Much labour is involved in the cutting of a big canoe, and none of the tools formerly used by the natives of Arnhem Land would have been fitted for
[412] this work. Although they possessed stone axes and shell scrapers, they lacked such tools as the fine, strong, relatively efficient adzes made from shell such as were used by the sea-faring peoples of Cape York Peninsula. This fact, and the way in which the wooden canoe was introduced, as well as its association with the Macassar voyagers, has given the *lippa lippa* a special place in Arnhem Land culture. But

[314] [20] The bark used is that of *Eucalyptus tetrodonta*, one of the "stringybarks", which is much used in technology. In addition to the manufacture of canoes, it serves for the roofing of houses and for the manufacture of certain vessels used for carrying water, as well as in the preparation of food.

177 hooks, beautifully carved, and light bamboo shafts),
411 all of which are foreign to the culture of East Arnhem Land but are very characteristic of the regions to the west and south-west.

In answer to my questions as to the origin of these objects, I received at first only the laconic reply "*warnba*", or "*warnbaŋor*",[34] west or from the west, lit. west-from, and when I pressed the enquiry further, my informants added "*birr-barlai!*", far away from, a remote place. *Birr* is used to signify very great or very remote, in time or space, e.g. *pämmän birr*—a very long time ago, in the dim past.

The boomerang does not really belong to the Arnhem Land culture, although fine specimens are seen there not
[431] infrequently. These are not manufactured locally and almost always show the character of the territory far to the south and south-west, from which they came. Their
[534] value in this territory is no longer as weapons for fighting or hunting, but for ceremonial purposes—as "sing sticks" or clappers for beating time—in place of the short heavy ironwood sticks called *birlma* used to beat time for *männikai* ("sings" or chants) which are the accompani-
[425] ment of each ritual and ceremonial act. Such *gerri* which
177 bear the halo and glamour of the celebrated exchange cycle,
411 are imbued with *marr*, with *virtu* or "value" apart
431 from their practical uses, and accordingly, some of them are used as objects of material culture and become ceremonial objects and may acquire a symbolic significance.[35] At first my enquiries elicited only the fact that these items

[34] *-ŋor', -ŋoru*, suffix expressing "motion from".

415 [35] A recent example is seen in the case of the boomerang, to
435 which reference has been made above, but other examples are not
778 lacking. One of these is *butulo*, recognisable as the replica (*mälli* lit. "shade") of an old square faced bottle carved from a block of

"from *warnba*" (the people of the west) entered the area principally from the south-west, by way of the Raimbaräŋa tribe, members of which have long been in the habit of travelling down to outlying cattle stations and even to the overland stock route, and that this food then came east. 177 411 431

Again, the most characteristic type of spear in use throughout Arnhem Land, including the northern shoreline, is *ŋämbi*, a hunting and fighting spear with a detachable flint head, (see frontispiece), *ŋämbi lirra*, (*lirra*, lit. tooth), mounted with hard beeswax and not with resin. There are only two quarries from which flint spear heads are derived, but the best, the ones properly called *ŋämbi*, come from the quarry at *ŋillipidji*, in the hills near the Walker River in the hinterland of Blue Mud Bay. From this one quarry, of almost legendary renown, come most of the flint spear heads of Eastern Arnhem Land. These *ŋämbi lirra* are generally passed from hand to hand encased in a neat sheath of *Melaleuca* bark (*bärukällu*) called *djalk*—a name applied only to the sheath of this one type of spear and giving its name to *kumur djalk*, the quarter (*kumur*) from which these spear heads enter and of which they are the most characteristic feature. Great bundles of these fine spear heads pass from hand to hand throughout Eastern Arnhem Land, and even farther away to the south, beyond the Roper River, as well as to the west across the Liverpool. The second quarry, mentioned above, is located in the 411 431 [135] [316]

ironwood and which has now become elevated to the level of clan totem. In bygone days glass bottles which were occasionally washed up on the beaches possessed special social value as material for scraps and cutting implements. Similarly the wooden Malay anchor, with a single fluke, which was used by early visitors who came to Arnhem Land from the Celebes, has acquired a symbolic significance which is quite distinct from its original material value as the anchor (*luku*, lit. the foot) of a prau. [778] 435 411

5179 431 602 *miwait*, I asked him if he did not make these *mindjalpi* himself. He replied "I make them, but different country—he must give me *wetj*—like this" (holding his hand out). "If you give me, I can't say 'I don't want it' because this arm belong him goes this way—it points along me. *Murr* (goodwill, spiritual power) goes this way, I must take it. *Wetj* is like *murr*."

182 431 435 But if it is the sociological bond, the *kumuryanna märnäa* relationship, which is so much stressed by the natives, this ceremonial exchange has also an economic side which is no less important than the ritual, and which accompanies it, taking advantage of the motive force and the mechanism and driving force of the more obvious ceremonial exchange. Under cover of the great ceremonial exchange system, of which an outline only has been given, large quantities of *gerri* pass from one territory to another, and although in some cases, as with the *bäti* (basket) called *mindjalpi*, the actual article itself varies little if at all from a similar object of local manufacture, it has special value, *virtu*, by reason of the fact that it has been made in another country. This is particularly true of spears, which circulate freely throughout the area, and are valued often because they are believed to possess special merit derived from their place of origin—because they acquire a halo of glamour and romance by reason of the way in which they are acquired; because they have *murr*. And although the natives still retain "ordinary", (non-sacred) objects, this gives those acquired by ceremonial exchange a history, a background, a personality which lifts them above other *wäkkinnu* objects and gives them a greatly enhanced value in the eyes of people who receive them.

182 431 Here then, is the nucleus of a great system of exchange, which, though it differs in many respects from our own established ideas of trade or barter, supplies an incentive,